# Introduction to Volume I

## *The Practice of Strategy*

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### Strategy Making: A Global, Eternal Phenomenon?

With this project, we aim to break new ground: it is our ambition to compile a first truly global history of strategic practice. How did the linking of political goals with military means take place in different parts of the world over the course of history? How have existing ideas and concepts been translated, adopted, enacted, imitated and emulated on and off the many battlefields around the world? There exist individual studies of warfare in the late Middle Ages, or in ancient Greece, or in the China of the Warring Kingdoms, but they are difficult to bring together as they are written by different authors, using different definitions, and many gaps remain. We want to remedy this by bringing together topics over a broad chronological and geographic span, written by the respective experts on the subject, but with strong editorial impositions in order to give the chapters in this series a common framework which alone will enable comparisons to be made.

The study of strategy has a very long pedigree. It could be argued that much of the history of humankind revolves around clashes between groups over resources and interests. A history of the practice of strategy around the globe and throughout recorded history to date, however, does not exist.

There are works that attempt to produce a general history of the 'art of war' – a term that has been used in the past in a way overlapping with 'strategy' as we define it below – but in fact they have tended to be Eurocentric or Western-centric, and often focus only on the very recent past.[1] This is in part a result also of the uneven development of scholarship in different parts of the world. There have been civilisations which quite deliberately turned their backs on their own past, like that of the early

1 E.g. I. G. Bagramjan, S. P. Ivanov et al. (eds), *История войн и военного искусства* (History of War and the Art of War) (Moscow, Воениздат, 1970); L. Freedman, *Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

French Revolution, or of early Communist Russia and Communist China. Most civilisations do take an interest in their own history, but this can take many forms. Some have looked at wars of the past as religious inspirations, others following nationalist agendas, others still for glorification of their armed forces. Even today, even in democracies, a whiff of opprobrium surrounds anybody criticising their own country, their own government, their own military, sometimes even with regard to events that took place centuries back. And in general, visitors from other continents often observe that Europe is (perhaps unhealthily) obsessed with its history, which on the up side may explain the disproportional crop of historical studies – including of military history and the history of strategy – on this small continent. More important than the unequal obsession with history, there is the unequal existence and survival of written historical sources in different parts of the world, and the impossibility for one author to master all the requisite languages to read existing secondary literature on all parts of the globe, let alone engage with sources written in obsolete languages. Arnold Toynbee's ten-volume history of the world is a case in point – it is an unparalleled attempt to encompass all of recorded history, and yet this scholar of Greek and Roman antiquity found it challenging to explain the history of ancient India or China.[2]

Attempts have been made to develop a more inclusive research agenda. Back in 2004 or earlier, Jeremy Black challenged his fellow historians to write a more global military history. He noted that military history up until that point was very much the history of Western exploits, with very little attention to non-Western experiences.[3] His assessment is still correct today. He has written several notable contributions, which have included treatments of other parts of the world, and yet their starting point remains modern history and the spread of empire, most notably the British Empire.[4] A review of Jeremy Black's book of 2004 remarked that 'the traditional canon of Western strategy and military history remains intact, a reflection perhaps of the essential and immutable underlying unity of all strategic calculations'.[5] This is one question we shall set out to ask of our contributors: can we find 'unity of strategic calculations' in all parts of the globe, in all periods of history?

Where extant works on strategy encompass a larger time span, the paucity of sources available to their authors often led to their mixing strategic *thought*

2 A. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, 10 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1934–1961).
3 J. Black, *Rethinking Military History* (London: Routledge 2004).
4 J. Black, *Military Strategy: A Global History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020).
5 T. G. Otte, 'Military strategy: a global history', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 31:3 (2020), 597–9, 598.

with less-well-documented strategic *practice*.[6] As writing on strategic thought – mostly preceding the introduction into western European languages of the term 'strategy' – was in fact plentiful in Europe from the sixteenth century,[7] there have been several studies of its evolution.[8] Their focus has been on Europe and later the West, which is fully justifiable as this was to a very large extent a self-contained discourse with very limited interaction with Islamic thought and none with other parts of the world: the work attributed to the Chinese sage Sunzi (Sun Tzu) was first translated into a European language only in the late eighteenth century.[9] While it did have an immediate impact on the strategies of the French Wars,[10] it was then all but ignored for another century and a half, and only became very influential in the West during and after the Vietnam War. There doubtless was much cross-influence in terms of weapons and practices. By contrast, we know of no influence of European writers on Chinese strategic thought before the twentieth century.[11] Even Europe's most immediate neighbour,

6 E.g. H. Delbrück, *Geschichte der Kriegskunst*, 4 vols (orig. 1900–1920, repr. Hamburg: Nikol, 2003); M. van Creveld, *A History of Strategy: From Sun Tzu to William S. Lind* (Kouvola: Castalia House, 2015).

7 B. Heuser (ed. and tr.), *The Strategy Makers* (Santa Barbara: ABClio 2010).

8 The notable multi-authored works in this tradition include P. Paret's famous *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); W. Murray, M. Knox and A. Bernstein (eds), *The Making of Strategy: Rulers, States, and War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); J. Baylis et al. (eds), *Makers of Nuclear Strategy* (London: Pinter, 1991); D. Coetzee and L. Eysturlid (eds), *Philosophers of War* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2013); J. Baechler and J.-V. Holeindre (eds), *Penseurs de la stratégie* (Paris: Herman, 2014); T. Jäger and R. Beckmann (eds), *Handbuch Kriegstheorien* (Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2011). The more coherent single-authored works are those of M. Handel, *Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought* (London: Frank Cass, 1992); A. Gat, *A History of Military Thought: From the Enlightenment to the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); B. Heuser, *Evolution of Strategy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

9 'Les treize articles sur l'art militaire, ouvrage composé en chinois par Suntse . . .' trans. and ed. by Père J.-M. Amiot and J. de Guignes, *Art militaire des chinois, ou recueil d'anciens traités sur la guerre, composés avant l'ere chrétienne, par différents généraux chinois* (Paris: Didot l'ainé, 1772).

10 S. Kleinman, 'Initiating insurgencies abroad: French plans to "chouannise" Britain and Ireland, 1793–1798', in B. Heuser (ed.), *The Origins of Small Wars: From Special Operations to Ideological Insurgencies*, special issue of *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 25/4 (August 2014), 784–99.

11 T. Andrade, 'An accelerating divergence? The revisionist model of world history and the question of Eurasian military parity: data from East Asia', *Canadian Journal of Sociology/Cahiers canadiens de sociologie*, 36:2 (2011), 185–208.

the Ottoman Empire, only belatedly took an interest in European writing on warfare, and then only on the most technical aspects.[12]

Where studies of strategy do deal with its *practice*, they are mainly written by military historians, usually with the evolution of a particular campaign centre stage, rather than its causes and strategic aims and context. Scholars with military backgrounds tend to interpret strategy as conducting operations. This again can be explained in part by the paucity of the sources on strategic decision making that have survived prior to the nineteenth or even twentieth centuries. Since 1945, however, the demography of the scholars interested in war has changed. There have been more civilians among them with an interest in strategy as a challenge for decision making, something that they have encountered perhaps in different walks of life.[13]

One recent work has taken a stab at recording and analysing the *practice* of strategy since antiquity and including some other parts of the world, but the selection of cases left many gaps, and the acquaintance of some of the authors with the subjects they discussed shows the lack, again, of the requisite language skills and detailed knowledge of culture and context.[14] Acknowledging that we too cannot go where our language deficiencies cannot take us, we endeavour in these two volumes to make up for our deficiencies by fielding a large team of experts to tackle their respective fields of expertise. The methodology we imposed on them will be discussed below, but it is now high time to explain what we mean by 'strategy' and its practice.

## Strategy as a Concept

The word 'strategy' itself derives from the Greek *strategos*, meaning the chief military commander, the general. The word *strategía* in its modern meaning only came into use in the sixth century, in the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire, and was only translated into Western vernacular languages towards the end of the eighteenth century.[15] Coming into use in the West around the

12 As can be seen from the very small number of Western works, mainly on fortifications and artillery, translated into Turkish and preserved in the Ottoman imperial library. See E. İhsanoğlu (ed.), *Osmanlı Askerlik Literatürü Tarihi*, 2 vols (İstanbul: İslâm Tarih, Sanat ve Kültür Araştırma Merkezi, 2004).

13 See also L. Milevski, 'Western strategy's two logics: diverging interpretations', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, published online 10 October 2019, available at www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01402390.2019.1672158.

14 For some good examples of this angle, see J. A. Olsen and C. S. Gray (eds), *The Practice of Strategy: From Alexander the Great to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Black, *Military Strategy*.

15 B. Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

time of the French Revolution, the meaning of the term has developed greatly since.

Many definitions of strategy have been articulated since. They may be summed up, admittedly clumsily: 'strategy is a comprehensive way to try to pursue political ends, including the threat or actual use of force, in a dialectic of wills'. And as this definition suggests, strategy can avail itself of both military and non-military tools, in ever new mixes, in pursuit of its ends.[16]

The most powerful instrument that can be used in adversarial encounters is the armed forces. Other means – some timeless, some technology- or culture-dependent – exist or have existed: economic leverage in particular. This leverage can take the form of trade or denial of trade, payments (chequebook diplomacy) that can be presented in many forms, ranging from voluntary gifts (such as Germany's payment to the USSR in 1990 to help house Soviet forces repatriated from East Germany) to exaction (such as Danegeld), protection money, tax, the vassals' due to their lord, the tribute to be paid by submitting tribes to their new overlord (which Ottoman Emperor Süleyman I imposed on Emperor Charles V in their five-year truce of 1547, euphemised as a 'gift of honour' by the latter while the Turks cashed it in as a 'tribute'), economic aid, or outright bribes.

Surrendering territory or populations or resources or any combination of these without a fight is surely also an instrument of strategy, designed to protect something more valuable from war and destruction. Other instruments include the conclusion of alliances, either short-term, as in the Greek *symmachia* to defeat a common adversary, or long-term, through kinship (real or perceived), already extant between groups (the Greek *syngeneia*), or created through dynastic marriages or friendship, presumably based on common values (the Greek *philia* sometimes covering this).

Throughout recorded history we encounter propaganda, alongside narratives favourable to one's own side and ambitions, such as passing off battles of uncertain outcome as great triumphs and victories: it is nothing less when we find Assyrian monarchs boasting on stone inscriptions about the towns they have sacked. And such retrospective narratives are the strategic tools of the present and future: rallying support, serving as deterrents and coercive signals towards enemies or third parties, and strengthening the leader's position of power within his (usually, but not always his) own polity.[17] In

16 For a comprehensive list, see Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy*, Chapter 1.

17 A. Altman, 'Tracing the earliest recorded concepts of international law: the early dynastic period in southern Mesopotamia', *Journal of the History of International Law*, 6:2 (2004), 153–72.

short, strategy is generally seen as an instrumental or utilitarian concept and at the same time relational: for something to qualify as 'strategy' rather than an intuitive response, an ends–means link should be present as well as assumptions about an adversary and his plans and aims.

Some scholars claim that strategy did not exist before the word. In this perspective, the idea of strategy only surfaced with the emergence of the 'military Enlightenment'.[18] Napoleon and the practices of war he introduced called for a distinction between war fighting or warfare and the political affairs of state revolving around antagonistic encounters. Many scholars thus assume that it was only with the extension of the battlefield, but also the massive increase of the armed forces in the shape of the *levée en masse*, that strategy emerged. This assumption is made explicitly or implicitly when the works focus only on the time since the French Wars of 1792–1815, which (supposedly) introduced 'warfare as we know it', and is often referred to as 'classical warfare' (which thus does not refer to classical antiquity).[19]

The first problem with this approach is that it excludes millennia of history. If we stick to the letter and claim that strategy only existed once the word 'strategy' was used, we must exclude all of ancient history and all of western European history before the late eighteenth century when Byzantine Emperor Leo VI's work using this term *strategia* was first translated into French and German as *stratégie*/*Strategie* (and some time later into English, Russian and so on). That would not make sense, as this volume illustrates: complex thinking and planning was devoted to ends and means of warfare well before the eighteenth century. Sometimes we must simply find similar meanings under other labels – what Count Guibert referred to as *tactique* in the mid-eighteenth century is nearly identical with what Napoleon called his *système de guerre* and what Prussians called *das Wehrsystem* in the mid-nineteenth century.

To this day it is debated whether any one Japanese word appropriately reflects the modern meaning of the term 'strategy'.[20] Most of the histories of strategic thought available today emphasise the modern period. The second problem with this approach is that it is vulnerable to the criticism that it is too focused on the 'classical' warfare conducted by states, revolving above all around battles fought between 'regular' armies employed by states. The

18 H. Strachan, 'The lost meaning of strategy', *Survival*, 47:3 (2005), 33–54.
19 D. A. Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014).
20 H. Nakatani, 'The development of US extended nuclear deterrence over Japan: a study of invisible deterrence between 1945 and 1970', PhD thesis, University of Reading (2019), Introduction.

recent past, however, especially the decades since the end of the Cold War, has been dominated by violent clashes of other forms, so the charge might be made that Napoleonic warfare and the manifestations of war most often associated with 'major war' since the mid-nineteenth century are no longer 'warfare as we know it' in our own times. (A closer look reveals that these were far from the only ones of that age, as asymmetric wars involving non-state actors at least on one side occurred all along.)

Against the historical background of great variety in the manifestation of war – Clausewitz pointed out that every age, every civilisation, has its own – how can we find evidence for strategy making, in the sense of our definition above? How to prove that some sort of strategic thinking along the lines of these definitions existed prior to the introduction of the term? To cut through this Gordian knot, we shall simply assume that we can find evidence of a 'strategy' when Kimberly Kagan's definition of 'strategy' applies, namely that leaders 'set objectives, establish priorities among them, and allocate resources to them, whether or not they develop or keep to long-range systematic plans'. Strategy is thus 'the setting of a state's [ruler's, oligarchy's . . .] objectives and of priorities among those objectives' in order to allocate resources and choose the best means to prosecute a violent engagement.[21] To put it simply, by focusing on the choices that were made about the use of resources to pay for wars and specifically for armed forces, about the creation of means (armed forces, weapons, supplies, fortifications) and their allocation (was the cavalry or the infantry more important? Did they opt for a navy or an army? If a little of both, did they prioritise one over the other? Did they build fortifications or prepare aggressive war? . . .), we can infer evidence of strategic decision making. While often direct evidence of such choices is lacking, inferences can be made about them from decisions taken, and from subsequent events.[22]

In order to prove workable, while Kagan's definition speaks of a state, we include under the umbrella of this term any political unit, polity or grouping that has displayed over the course of time the ability to execute this practice of aligning objectives with priorities and resources. In essence we focus on political systems, which can be defined as 'any persistent pattern of human relationships

21 K. Kagan, 'Redefining Roman grand strategy', *Journal of Military History*, 70:2 (2006), 333–62, 348.

22 E.g., if the Persians in the 1070s gave the Ottoman Turks '50 000 tents' of Turkmen and Tatars to accompany them on their incursion into the East Roman Empire, we can infer that they had plumped for a war by proxy rather than an undertaking by their own forces. ʿĀṣıḳ-Paşa-zāde, *Vom Hirtenzelt zur Hohen Pforte: Frühzeit und Aufstieg des Osmanenreiches nach der Chronik 'Denkwürdigkeiten und Zeitläufte des Hauses Osman' vom Derwisch Ahmed, genannt ʿAşik-Paşa-Sohn*, tr. Richard F. Kreutel (Graz: Styria, 1959), 20f.

that involves, to a significant extent, power, rule and authority'.[23] In our selection of cases detailed below, we have included a diverse set of actors of a diverse nature ranging from terrorist groups and insurgency movements to vast empires. Our concept of agency includes both individual agency, such as the roles of Pericles and Bismarck, and collective processes and procedures of shaping strategy in different empires, states and armed groups. Moreover, strategy is a relational concept as it requires at least one adversary upon whom effects are supposed to be attained. Agency therefore works in at least two ways.

### *A Strategy for a Conflict, Grand Strategy or Overall Aims in War and Peace?*

Further clarification is needed. There is an overlap in the usage of the terms 'strategy' in the sense of 'a strategy for a particular conflict', sometimes rendered as 'plan for an operation', and 'strategy' meaning an overarching, complex plan that might be pursued in war and peace, taking into account multiple factors. Increasingly, we see the term 'grand strategy' employed for the latter. It has been demonstrated that this term was used with multiple meanings,[24] until Basil Henry Liddell Hart wrote that 'the role of grand strategy – higher strategy – is to coordinate and direct all the resources of a nation, or band of nations, towards the attainment of the political object of the war – the goal defined by fundamental policy'.[25] It has since been used in many similar ways to denote a strategy (usually with reference to the USA) that uses multiple tools, including non-violent tools, to pursue a set of overall aims, but no single dominant definition has emerged. This use of multiple tools, including 'political, economic, psychological and military forces as necessary during peace and war', has, at least since the early Cold War, been related to 'strategy' *tout court*, with no need seen to add 'grand' to the mix.[26] We thus see no need to use the term for our purposes here, but emphasise that, throughout our two volumes, when the term 'strategy' is used, we take it to encompass multiple tools.

Moreover, no generally agreed definition of 'grand strategy' has emerged. As the editors of *The Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy* have noted, 'The more "grand strategy" is associated with war, the more it blurs into military

23 R. Dahl, *Modern Political Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1965), 6.
24 L. Milevski, *The Evolution of Modern Grand Strategic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
25 B. H. Liddell Hart, *The Decisive Wars of History: A Study in Strategy* (London: G. Bell, 1929), 150 f.
26 US Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Dictionary of the U.S. Military Terms for Joint Usage* (1964), quoted in E. Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 239–41.

strategy. Yet the more "grand strategy" is detached from military strategy, the more it expands to encompass seemingly the entire realm of politics.'[27] Given how the term is most frequently used in relation to the USA, with its almost unmatched tools and resources, it is a little embarrassing when attempts are made to attribute 'grand strategies' to small powers, all with the good intention of treating them as equals in international affairs when the distribution of power is clearly at odds with this.[28] For our purposes, it will suffice occasionally to add the word 'overall' to 'strategy' or to speak less grandly about 'overall aims' if there is the need to distinguish between a strategy for a particular war or campaign, and the overall larger aims pursued by the rulers or governments of a polity over longer periods of time.

## Studying Strategy

Moving beyond the etymological and conceptual origins of strategy, the field of strategic studies has been subject to a number of biases: occidento-centrism and the heavy focus on recent history discussed above, and the related excessive focus on the here and now.[29] Another is the tendency to see history in linear terms in which the present is a development of the recent past and has less in common with more remote periods of history. Then there is the belief that only we act 'rationally' while decisions based on different beliefs or premises are those of 'irrational actors'. Last but not least, there is the proclivity to focus on material factors such as geography, resources and technology to the exclusion of ideational and cultural factors.

### *The State-centric Approach*

Intimately linked to a preference for contemporary and Western strategic thought is the tendency to look mostly at the state as the standard in strategy rather than other political power brokers and centres of strategic agency.[30] This results in a concentration on aims and means used by the modern state,

27 T. Balzacq and R. R. Krebs, 'The enduring appeal of grand strategy', in Balzacq and Krebs (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 1–21, 2.

28 A. Wivel, 'The grand strategies of small states', in Balzacq and Krebs, *The Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy*, 490–505.

29 I. Duyvesteyn and J. E. Worrall, 'Global strategic studies: a manifesto', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 40:3, (2016), 347–57. Isabelle Duyvesteyn and Jeffrey H. Michaels, 'Revitalizing strategic studies in an age of perpetual conflict', *Orbis*, 60:1 (2015–2016), 22–35.

30 A notable exception is Freedman, *Strategy*, which includes the 'strategies' of political movements, the rise of industries and business strategies.

which is a product only of Western early modern history. Moreover, politics and resultant strategy as a decision-making process of the modern state hampers the analysis of strategy making in premodern societies, in polities that do not qualify in terms of structure as 'modern states', and of non-state actors of all sorts which have played a part in many wars around the globe, throughout history, as they still do at present. For example, this state-centric approach has obstructed understandings of patrimonial politics in Africa which have provided a distinct political logic to the so-called barbaric 'new wars' on the continent.[31]

### *Rational and Irrational Actors*

Closely linked to the excessive focus on the modern state is the conceptualisation of ends or goals that are pursued in violent engagement. Ideas about what the ends or goals are in warfare have been strictly married to the Western idea of politics and what politics is supposed to entail. Politics as secular, and based on interests, tends to be measured in terms of material objects such as land or resources, or in terms of power for the sake of domination, rather than power to promote some ideal, religion or ideology. When Clausewitz wrote his *opus magnum*, religion as a factor inciting wars had all but disappeared in Europe. As he himself was sceptical of democracy, he trod a difficult path between, on the one hand, grudgingly acknowledging the force of ideology in mobilising the French people, and, on the other, his reluctance to prescribe it for Prussia. His articulation of the relationship between *die Politik* and war as her instrument thus excluded ideology; emotions he relegated to another pole of his wondrous trinity, that which might be associated with the people, but not with policy making.[32] The Clausewitzian tradition in part explains why the mobilising power of political Islam embraced by al-Qaeda and the Islamic State or of Russian neo-imperialist nationalism has been underestimated in the West in recent years.

Contrary to most other significant academic disciplines, strategic studies have made limited headway in exploring alternatives to the narrowly utilitarian, instrumental approaches to strategy. Weighing costs and benefits, and making informed choices guided by what we today would see as a state's (supposedly objective) 'interests', form the dominant lens through which to view the development of strategy. Strategic studies have their roots in two

31 I. Duyvesteyn, *Clausewitz and African War: Politics and Strategy in Liberia and Somalia* (London: Frank Cass, 2005).

32 B. Heuser, 'Clausewitz, *die Politik*, and the political purpose of strategy', in Balzacq and Krebs, *The Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy*, 57–72.